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WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 30, 1974

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## Release of Chilean Prisoners Still Only a Promise

15C The prisoner release program announced last month by Chilean President Salvador Allende remains more a promise than a reality. Freedom has been slow in coming — the vast majority of prisoners, but the program is still alive.

The question of who qualifies for release has given rise to considerable speculation and some confusion. Pinochet, in his anniversary speech on September 11, referred specifically to those arrested under the state of siege.

On October 4, Interior Minister Benavides declared that 1,134 persons fell into this category as of September 11. He said that 366 already had been freed and

that all of the remainder, except those against whom there were serious charges, would be released soon.

Pinochet had said that the release program might be extended to certain cases of people already sentenced, but Benavides carefully limited the release to detainees against whom no charges had yet been brought. Benavides would thus appear to exclude an estimated 4,000 already tried and sentenced, or charged and awaiting trial. This large group apparently will not benefit from the initial stage of the release program, but may eventually be freed, perhaps in conjunction with a program of pardons and a limited amnesty.

Early this month, the government promised that all persons then under detention would be freed or charged by early November.

In announcing the release program, Pinochet implied that only persons who agreed to leave Chile would be freed. It appears, however, that most of those now being released are, in fact, being allowed to remain in the country. Allende regime officials will probably be exceptions. Orlando Letelier, former ambassador to

the U.S., has already been released and expelled.

When the government begins releasing persons already convicted or charged with "serious" crimes, it is likely to require money to leave. European and Latin American disinclination to receive more Chilean refugees could impede release of individuals the government will not allow to remain in Chile.

Pinochet accepted his announcement with a declaration that the military government had a "moral duty" before implementing its program to demand that the U.S., R and Cuba offer the right to emigrate to an equal number of arrested persons or convicted prisoners. It is clear that he hoped to reap a propaganda harvest from the challenge but that positive Soviet and Cuban responses are not preconditions for the release of Chilean prisoners.

If the first stage winds up next month as scheduled and if the government by then determines that it has met its challenge to the Cubans and Soviets for all it is worth, the program may get under way in earnest with substantial progress by Christmas.

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